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POPULATION INFORMATION NETWORK FOR AFRICA
(POPIN-AFRICA) ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING,
1ST SESSION, ADDIS ABABA

17-19 DECEMBER 1985

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I. Organization and attendance

1. The first meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Population Information Network for Africa (POPIN-Africa) was held at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa from 17 to 19 December 1985.

2. Participating in the meeting were representatives from the Cairo Demographic Centre (CDC), the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS), RESADOC of the Sahel Institute, the Centre for African Family Studies (CAFS), the National Population Bureau of Nigeria, the Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia, the Kenya National Library Service, the Institute for Development Research of the University of Addis Ababa, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, United Nations Population Division (New York), the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), UNESCO/BREDA (Dakar), ESCAP (Bangkok), the Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS) of ECA, and the ECA Population Division. The list of participants is annexed to this report.

3. Mr. A Bahri, Director of the ECA Population Division, chaired the meeting. The Co-ordinating Unit of POPIN-Africa acted as secretariat. The provisional agenda was slightly amended and adopted.

II. Opening

4. Mr. M. Tchouta-Moussa, the ECA Deputy Executive Secretary, formally opened the meeting. In his opening remarks, he welcomed the participants to the meeting. He noted with satisfaction the development of events which had led to the inauguration of POPIN-Africa as well as the first POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee Meeting. He indicated that population information is a major catalyst for resolving some of the urgent and persistent problems facing the African Region.

5. He said that POPIN-Africa gives concrete expression to earlier resolutions made by member States at various ECA Conference of Ministers regarding the improvement and expansion of population information activities in the Region. He indicated that UNFPA funding made it possible for POPIN-Africa to be launched in January 1984 with the establishment of the Co-ordinating Unit within the ECA Population Division.

6. He called on the Advisory Committee to provide direction and guidelines for the successful implementation of POPIN-Africa.

III. Discussion of Agenda items

Objectives, structure, functions and services of POPIN-Africa (Agenda Item 3)

7. The representative of the Co-ordinating Unit of POPIN-Africa introduced this agenda item. She briefed the meeting on the objectives, structure, functions and services of POPIN-Africa. These reflected what had been agreed upon at earlier POPIN-Africa meetings. Referring to the organizational chart, she explained the different operational levels and interconnections within the network.

8. In the discussion that followed it was noted that although the CDC was to cover literature in Arabic, in actual fact most of the literature at that centre was in English. An amendment was therefore to be made on this so that the Centre would cover North African countries and not necessarily literature in Arabic.

9. One of the participants asked for clarification regarding the structuring of POPIN-Africa along geographic and linguistic lines and the development of norms and standards to cater for Arabic. Regarding the structuring and allocation of responsibilities among the sub-regional participating centres, it was explained that with the linguistic problem in the region the current breakdown of the network could not be helped, and that at the last POPIN-Africa Review Meeting held in December 1984, it had been agreed that the current coverage and breakdown of responsibilities provides a pragmatic and effective way of collecting and storing population information for the Region for the time being. With regard to utilization of norms and standards and catering for the Arabic script, it was explained that the Co-ordinating Unit itself does not intend to establish any such standards. It will, however, utilize such facilities when they become available through the Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS) of the UNECA. The representative of PADIS explained that PADIS was already in close touch with the Arab League Documentation System (ALDOC) regarding the arabization of the thesaurus and other information processing tools.

10. Considerable time was then spent discussing the structure of POPIN-Africa and the functions allocated to the various components. It was noted that the ultimate aim of the network was to help national centres to develop appropriate national population information infrastructures to serve their needs. Formalizing how each national centre should develop would be difficult as countries were at different levels of development vis-a-vis population information and documentation activities. The problem appeared to be one of the identification of national centres and the designation of national focal points knowing that in Africa, there are no national population commissions to serve as focal points as is the case in Asia. It was observed that it took ESCAP twelve years to develop thirteen national population information centres. This had been a very slow process, but it was felt that in Africa the process might be considerably accelerated because of the introduction of the intermediate level of the subregional participating centres. Since the subregional centres are closer to the national centres, they are better placed to help in the identification and development of national participating centres.

11. It was observed that the situation in Africa regarding population information and documentation differed considerably from that in Asia or Latin America. Since there were no national population information centres or focal points and development at the national level was very minimal or non-existent, POPIN-Africa would have to utilize the existing regional or interregional centres of excellence to get some work going. National centres would be a little slower to develop.

12. Experience from the Sahel Institute illustrated the situation and problems in the Sahel regarding the operationalization of national centres. In the case of Nigeria, it appeared that the National Population Bureau would be in a good position to serve as a national focal point in that country. After several other representatives had expressed views on the issue, the general consensus was that there was no single solution taking into consideration the general situation in the Region. Both the sub-regional and the national participating

centres would have to be developed simultaneously. It was stressed, however, that it was necessary to make proper selection of parent focal point at national level by involving sub-regional centres and the governments concerned in this

13. In summing up on this series of discussions, the Chairman stated that there would be the need to enforce and strengthen the sub-regional participating centres to enable them perform their respective roles, that those national centres which are able to, should be assisted and strengthened to become national participating centres of POPIN-Africa. As the network evolves other strategies may be adopted to cater for all needs.

Progress report on POPIN-Africa, 1984-1985 (Agenda Item 4)

(i) Activities undertaken by the Co-ordinating Unit

14. The representative of the Co-ordinating Unit introduced this item explaining that much of the activities undertaken over the last two years had been concentrated on laying a firm infrastructure at the Co-ordinating Unit. In the process of consolidating itself, the Unit had also undertaken the following;

(a) Publications and clearing-house services - the first two issues of POPIN-Africa Briefs were published and distributed; the first issue of POPINDEX-Africa was also published and distributed. African Population Profile and 4 issues of the African Population Newsletter were also produced over the same period.

(b) Acquisition of documents and collection building - over 1,800 publications were acquired over the period. The POPIN-AFRICA Duplicates programme (POPAF-Dups) was initiated to help circulate duplicate materials to interested persons and institutions.

(c) Data-base creation and system development - the POPIN-Africa data-base was created with technical backstopping from PADIS. The new POPIN-Africa input sheet has been finalized and is awaiting printing.

Other activities undertaken included the updating of the mailing list, technical assistance mission to the Arab League and the organization of the POPIN-Africa Review Meeting in December 1984.

(ii) Activities undertaken by the sub-regional, national and other participating centres

15. Despite problems of funding of activities at the sub-regional participating centres, the centres maintained their interest in POPIN-Africa and some even managed to undertake some activities. Each of the centres and institutions represented at the meeting gave presentations on their activities.

16. After the presentations, the Chairman thanked everyone noting how much had been learned from the activities reported on.

POPIN-Africa Planned Activities, 1986/87 (Agenda Item 5)

17. The representative from the Co-ordinating Unit introduced this agenda item and stated that while the period 1984/85 had been largely devoted to laying the necessary foundations at the Co-ordinating Unit, it was hoped to consolidate the participation of sub-regional participating centres in the planned 1986/87 activities. Definite efforts will be made to involve as many national centres as possible to participate actively in the network. Training and advisory services to national centres in population information and documentation will form part of the major activities to be undertaken by both the Co-ordinating Unit and the sub-regional participating centres. Improved exchange of population information among the members of the network will also be given great attention during 1986-1987. There were plans also to sensitize policy makers during the forthcoming Joint Conference of Planners, Statisticians and Demographers (PSD 4) Meeting about POPIN-Africa activities.

18. In the discussions which followed, it was noted that the number of publications envisaged were too many. It was suggested therefore that information currently contained in POPIN-Africa Briefs should be inserted in African Population Newsletter to inform planners etc. Issues relating to technical matters of POPIN-Africa could be directly addressed to network members in the form of technical letters or bulletins as and when necessary. Regarding the publication of the Directory of African Demographers, it was noted that PADIS currently has technical responsibility for the management of the ECA data base for producing directories of experts in the African Region. However, the responsibility of in-putting the information for various directories was that of the Divisions concerned. Modalities for the publication of the directories have yet to be worked out and POPIN-Africa was to liaise with PADIS on the issue.

19. Regarding the compilation of special bibliographies, the chairman enquired whether it would not be possible to have a separate section of POPINDEX-Africa devoted to them. It was explained that this would not be feasible and that the intention was to get the sub-regional or national participating centres to undertake these assignments. Topics of special interest could be identified and the assignment given to specialists at national or sub-regional centres or institutions to undertake. POPIN-Africa Co-ordinating Unit would assume responsibility for the printing of the output. One of the participants suggested that POPIN-Africa might consider using scholars and researchers on sabbatical leave etc. to undertake these tasks so that there could be savings in cost etc.

20. A question was raised on what had happened to the preparation of the guidelines on POPIN-Africa methodologies which had been requested at last year's POPIN-Africa Review Meeting. It was explained that staffing and other related problems had prevented this assignment from being undertaken lastyear but that it would be done in 1986.

21. It was suggested that the Co-ordinating Unit should prepare a guide for information personnel which would include methods for the acquisition, processing and distribution of information, and approaches to identifying information user needs. It should also include guidelines on computerization of data to ensure compatibility between different network participants. It was pointed out that global POPIN has produced a series of manuals and guidelines on various aspects of information processing and handling including computerization.

Issues which require action by the Advisory Committee (Agenda Item 6)

1. Funding

22. The representative from the Co-ordinating Unit expressed concern regarding the status of funding of the sub-regional participating centres. While RESADOC had received a three-year grant from the IDRC to recruit and train staff and acquire documents etc. to ensure participation in POPIN-Africa, funding for the CDC, IFORD and RIPS had not been secured.

23. In response, the IDRC representative informed the meeting of IDRC's continued interest and support to POPIN-Africa. The IDRC representative stressed that IDRC funding is in principle, 'seed money' used to get important activities started and operational and could not continue indefinitely. He encouraged participants to continuously seek to handle the most important/ useful information that could in the future be supported by user contributions. He also stressed the importance of avoiding duplication of efforts that unnecessarily increase project costs. The IDRC representative also briefed the meeting on the present situation of project proposals submitted to IDRC for funding: negotiations for the funding of IFORD population information activities were being finalized and funding is expected to become available early next year. The CDC was assisted to prepare a project proposal and funds are expected to be made available to CDC soon. Regarding RIPS, the IDRC was planning a mission there early next year.

24. The representative of the CDC suggested that sub-regional participating centres might also consider seeking funding through bilateral agreements. It was also suggested that countries might be requested to utilize their IPF's to get funds but the Chairman explained that the experience with some of the Division's training institutes indicated that this was not possible with UNDP. The UNFPA representative mentioned that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) had expressed interest in possible funding for IFORD while the US Agency for International Development (USAID) had expressed similar interest in CAPS activities.

25. It was further suggested that the subregional, national and sectoral participating centres should try and obtain funds from their parent organizations so that they are not entirely dependent on external funds.

2. The Cairo Demographic Centre and POPIN-Africa

26. This item was discussed briefly, and it was noted that while there is keen interest at the Centre for participation in POPIN-Africa, the matter has still got to be cleared by the Governing Council of the CDC in view of the unique role

of the CDC as an inter-regional training and research centre. The representative of the CDC promised to discuss further with the Director of the CDC on her return and to get the Director to communicate with ECA on the matter.

3. The status of CAFS within POPIN-Africa

27. The Committee was requested by the Co-ordinating Unit to formally invite CAFS to serve as a sub-regional participating centre of POPIN-Africa. After much discussion during which the issue of creating sub-regional participating centres for East, Central and Southern Africa was also raised, the Committee agreed to make CAFS a sectoral participating centre to take care of family planning, family life education literature for POPIN-Africa.

4. Guidelines for membership in POPIN-Africa

28. The Committee reviewed the draft guidelines submitted by the Co-ordinating Unit. It approved the guidelines as amended below.

Guidelines for membership of the Population Information Network for Africa (POPIN-Africa)

Membership

29. As a network, POPIN-Africa will be composed of population libraries, information and documentation centres, systems, clearing-houses, research institutions, statistical offices, agencies and institutions in the African Region that promote activities in population information related fields.

30. Members may be governmental, intergovernmental or non-governmental at the national, sub-regional or regional level in the African Region.

31. Associate or affiliate membership shall be open to centres, information systems and networks outside the African Region which may have some special contributions to make towards the advancement of the goals of POPIN-Africa.

Role of Members

32. All categories of members of the network shall be expected to:

(i) actively co-operate with other network members to promote better ways of identifying and improving the flow of population information within the Region;

(ii) institute co-operative arrangements to facilitate the strengthening of population information activities;

(iii) agree to utilize, whenever possible, those standards for information exchange adopted for the use of network members;

(iv) provide the Co-ordinating Unit with information pertaining to their population information activities;

(v) contribute information for includion in POPIN-Africa publications;

(vi) share information, knowledge, experiences and expertise to the extent possible;

(vii) establish and maintain the infrastructures necessary for promoting the overall aims and objectives of POPIN-Africa.

5. POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee

33. The Committee reviewed the draft terms of reference and amended same as below.

Terms of reference of the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee

The Functions of the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee shall be to:

(i) Provide an overall general, substantive and organizational guidance and advise on population information activities in the Africa Region for the efficient and effective operation of the network;

(ii) Appraise and review the activities of the network, particularly those of the Co-ordinating Unit so as to ensure that these activities meet the actual needs of members and users, especially at the national level;

(iii) Critically evaluate, make recommendations and determine priority areas for the implementation of the programme of work of the Co-ordinating Unit;

(iv) Provide guidelines for membership of the network;

(v) Establish and provide terms of reference and guidance for specific tasks to be undertaken by working or ad-hoc groups, to review their findings and to make appropriate recommendations for follow-up action by the Co-ordinating Unit;

(vi) Report to the Population Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, major decisions, etc. requiring follow-up action;

(vii) Perform such other functions as may from time to time be deemed necessary by the ECA within their area of competence.

The Membership of the Advisory Committee shall be composed of representatives of regional, sub-regional, sectoral and national institutions of the African Region. Others representing concerned global, inter-regional and regional entities may also be invited to serve as members. Members of the Committee must have technical expertise and interest in the establishment and development of population information activities especially in the African Region.

The Venue of the Advisory Committee shall be ECA Headquarters unless invited by on of its members.

Any other business (Agenda item 7)

Venue of future POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee Meetings

34. The Committee agreed that unless invited by a POPIN-Africa member to hold meetings elsewhere, meetings will be held at the Headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Task Force to determine priority activities for 1986/87

35. The Committee requested three of the participants to constitute a Task Force to study areas requiring urgent attention next year and accordingly assign responsibilities for a Working Group to meet in 1986. The Task Force identified the following as areas requiring attention: exchange of lists of the publications of the network members; modalities for making contributions to subsequent issues of POPINDEX-Africa, and the identification of information sources. The Co-ordinating Unit, in consultation with the concerned centres was to work out the details for implementation of the suggested activities.

36. Considerable discussion ensued regarding what the Working Group should concentrate on for 1986 in view of the various areas requiring attention. It was finally agreed that a POPIN-Africa Technical Working Group should be constituted for 1986 to review the draft manual and guide for population information personnel; to provide a survey design for a users' needs survey and to evaluate the results; and to look into issues connected with computerization of population information services in the region. The Co-ordinating Unit was to finalize these terms of reference in consultation with the appropriate bodies.

Appointment of POPIN-Africa Co-ordinator

37. The Chairman informed the Committee that a suitable candidate has been identified to fill the vacant post of Co-ordinator of POPIN-Africa. Mr. Benoit, a Mauritian who is fully bi-lingual and an experienced information scientist is expected to assume duty early January 1986.

Adoption of the report (Agenda item 8)

38. The Committee discussed and reviewed its draft recommendations. After the necessary amendments, the Committee adopted the full report and the recommendations.

Closing of the Meeting (Agenda item 9)

39. The Chairman, Mr. Bahri, formally closed the meeting thanking all participants for their active and keen participation in this first meeting of the POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee. He commented that the meeting had run smoothly, thus enabling the proceedings to be concluded on schedule. He hoped that the participants had had a pleasant stay in Addis Ababa and wished them safe-journey back to their respective destinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The POPIN-Africa Advisory Committee recommends that:

1. the Co-ordinating Unit should more widely publicize the activities of POPIN-Africa among African institutions and agencies;

2. the Co-ordinating Unit should, in consultation with the existing sub-regional participating centres and other relevant institutions in the Region, investigate the need to identify and establish a sub-regional centre to cater for East, Central and Southern Africa;

3. bilateral arrangements should be sought to raise funds to supplement activities of the sub-regional participating centres;

4. POPIN-Africa Briefs should be merged with the African Population Newsletter and a section provided in the Newsletter to cater for POPIN-Africa activities;

5. guidelines for computerization and issues connected with compatibility should be developed to inform both national and sub-regional participating centres;

6. actions should be taken to identify and strengthen national, sub-regional, and sectoral participating centres to perform their respective roles in the network and an appropriate standard survey be developed for the purpose;

7. the needs of users should be constantly borne in mind in designing and implementing activities and services;

8. CAFS should be invited to join POPIN-Africa as a sectoral participating centre to cater for information pertaining to family planning and family life education in the region;

9. the Advisory Committee of POPIN-Africa shall meet once every two years;

10. Working Groups will be established to deal with specific issues as they are identified;

11. the Advisory Committee shall hold its meetings at the Headquarters in Addis Ababa unless invited by a POPIN-Africa member;

12. there should be continuous monitoring and evaluation of the activities of POPIN-Africa to ensure that services and outputs satisfy the end users.